

Revelation 7:9-16

Mark Twain once said, “The only two things in life which are **certain** are **death** and **taxes**.” But I know there are **lots** of people who would **disagree** with him. They faithfully **pay** their taxes, and they have no doubts about their **mortality**, but they also understand that there are **other things** which are certain in life. They’re absolutely **certain** that their sins have been **paid for**, that when they **die** they’ll **rise** from the dead, and that they will inherit **eternal life** in heaven. You know them **too**, because you and I are **part** of that group. We’re **Christians - believers** in Jesus - members of the Holy Christian **Church**. We confess with **certainty** the words of the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe in the **forgiveness** of sins, the **resurrection** of the body, and the **life everlasting**.”

In our text for today, the Apostle **John** saw a **vision** - a vision of believers in **heaven** - believers who came from **every nation** on earth. They were wearing **white robes**. **White** is a symbol of **holiness**. Since we’re all born with a **sinful nature**, how did these people get to **be holy** in the presence of **God**? One of the elders in John’s vision **answered** that question for us. He proclaimed, “*They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*” We are **certain** that we have been **Forgiven Through The Blood Of The Lamb**.

Now before we start getting all **high** and **mighty** with people because we are **among** that group in heaven, we need to realize that **we sin** just as much as everyone else does. We should consider ourselves to be in the same boat as the Apostle **Paul** - as the **worst** of sinners. **Envy** and **anger** darken our hearts - **lying** pollutes our mouths - **backbiting** and **laziness** blemish the things we do in life. By nature we are **unclean** in the presence of God, and have justly earned His eternal **wrath** and **judgment** for our sins. We **can’t** wash ourselves **clean**, and all the perfume in the world won’t **cover up** the **stench** of our sins. All the good deeds we **think** we do, fail to accomplish **anything** in God’s sight. So, each and every day, we need to plead for **God’s mercy** on us.

Praying for **mercy** expresses the **confidence** we have that **in God** - our **Good Shepherd** - there **is** mercy. That’s the very **heart** of the message which God **reveals** to us in His Word. In His great **mercy** God sent His only-begotten Son to the **cross**, to be the atoning **sacrifice** which would pay for the sins of the world. In His great **mercy**, Jesus suffered the death and hell on the **cross** which **we** deserved. And on that **cross** Jesus, in His great **mercy**, paid-in-full the **penalty** for **all** sins. Through the Prophet Isaiah the Holy Spirit tells us, “*It was because of our rebellion that he was pierced. He was crushed for the guilt our sins deserved. The*

punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Jesus truly is: “*The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,*” and because of His great **mercy**, His mission was **accomplished**, and our sins have been **forgiven**.

We can be absolutely **certain** that we have been **Forgiven Through The Blood Of The Lamb**. So, there’s no reason for us to try to **deny** our sins, or to make **excuses** for them. There’s no need for us to try to **compare** ourselves to **others**, or to think that we don’t **need** God’s mercy. And we dare not allow ourselves to be **mised** into thinking that **we** can clean up our act and take care of our sins **ourselves**. All we need to do is take a look into the mirror of **God’s Law**, and we’ll clearly see a **sinner** staring back at us. All we need to do is take a look at the works of **our hands**, and understand that “*No one will be justified by the works of the law.*” No. We need to hang on to **Jesus**, who is the **Lamb** of God, and our Good **Shepherd**.

Isn’t it interesting that Jesus is **both** - the **Lamb** of God and our Good **Shepherd**? He’s the **Lamb** because of His **sacrifice** for us. No matter **what** we’ve done - no matter how **bad** the deed - we can put our full confidence in what the Bible says, “*In (Christ) we also have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in keeping with the riches of his grace.*” Jesus offered His **perfect life**, and shed **His blood** for us on the cross, to **appease** God’s anger with sin - to tear down the **wall** which kept us **separated** from God - and to **reunite** us with Him **forever**.

Since we have been **assured** of God’s **forgiveness**, we should strive to **let go** of all the self-destructive habits that afflict us. We can **rid ourselves** of all **self-pity**, and open our hearts to receive the **joy** and **peace** which come from being **forgiven** by the LORD. We can go out into the world and live **new lives** - lives which show that we’ve been **set free** from sin. We are **new creations** in Christ - people who strive to forgive **one another**, because God has forgiven **us**. Martin Luther said that where there is **forgiveness of sins** there is also **life** and **salvation**. With **sin** no longer barring the door to heaven, it’s **wide open**. By faith in Jesus we are **certain** of the **resurrection** of the body, and the life **everlasting**.

But Jesus is **also** our **Good Shepherd**. He’s our **Shepherd** in the way that He **takes care** of us. What does a **shepherd** do for his **sheep**? Sheep are pretty **helpless** animals, so the shepherd is there to **lead** them and **guide** them. He sees to it that they have enough **food** to eat - He provides them with **shelter** from the elements - and He **protects** them from predators. The people of this world are like

helpless sheep - we're prone to **illness** and **injury** - and we're too **stupid** to even know what's **good** for us. The Bible says, "*Yes, the people are **grass**. **Grass withers**, **flowers fade**.*" The killing frost of **sin** and **death** is **inescapable** for us. "*The wages of **sin** is **death***" - and that's not just **physical** death - that's an **eternal separation** from God - an **eternal death** in the darkness of **hell**.

That's what we **deserve**. But it's the **following** words of that verse which we **cling** to: "*The **gift of God** is **eternal life**.*" Our Good Shepherd doesn't just take care of us in **this life**, but the Bible clearly tells us that He has "***abolished death** and brought **life** and **immortality** to light through the gospel.*" We don't need to be **afraid** of death, because as David assures us in the 23rd Psalm, "*The **LORD** is my **shepherd**, I lack **nothing** ... Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of **death**, I will fear **no evil**, for **you** are **with me**. Your **rod** and your **staff**, they **comfort me**.*"

On the Last Day, when Jesus returns, He will give the command for **all** the dead to **rise**. The **unbelievers** will rise to eternal **death**, but the **believers** will rise to eternal **glory**. Jesus will **transform** our **lowly** bodies to be like His **glorious** body, so we will be able to live with Him, **body and soul**, forever in heaven. Our text describes this ongoing **care** from our Good Shepherd in **this** way: "*He who sits on the throne will **spread his tent** over them. They will **never be hungry or thirsty** ever again. The **sun** will never **beat** upon them, nor will any scorching **heat**.*"

This is the **certainty** which we have in Jesus. And because of that certainty, we are able to look **beyond** the troubles of this life, and to focus our thoughts on **eternal** things. We will not be **deceived** or **misled** by the **false teachers** in this world, who direct us to look **within ourselves** to find **inner** peace. **Jesus** is our peace - **Jesus** is our salvation. No one ever gets to heaven by wishful **thinking**, rather, we get to heaven by **believing** - believing in **Jesus** as our Savior from sin - believing that we have been **Forgiven Through The Blood Of The Lamb**.

Jesus provides us with all the **confidence** we will ever need. He will **never** leave us or forsake us. We are **confident** that He will take care of **all** our needs in **this life**, and that He will walk **with us** through the valley of the shadow of **death**, and He will **raise** our bodies from the dead to live with Him **forever**. Our **baptism** reminds us of those facts **every day**, as Paul told the **Romans**, "*We were therefore **buried** with (Christ) by this **baptism** into his **death**, so that just as he was **raised** from the dead through the glory of the Father, **we too** would also walk in a **new life**. For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his **death**, we will*

certainly also be united with him in the likeness of his resurrection.” Thank God that we can be **certain** we have been **saved**, and that we have **eternal life** in **heaven** waiting for us, because we have been **Forgiven Through The Blood Of The Lamb**. Amen.